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SOME ASPECTS OF THE FORMATION OF THE STATE IN ANCIENT SOUTH ARABIA

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Most of the Arabian peninsula is desert, with the exception of the mountains of Oman and some oases and steppe regions in North, Central and East Arabia.[1] The most suitable place for cultivation and life is the southwestern part of the peninsula called Yemen. In this region, high culture appeared roughly around the beginning of the first millennium B.C. and continued to the advent of Islam. It represents one of the ancient Near Eastern cultural centers. It should be noted that with regard to the culture of pre-Islamic Arabia, a major cultural distinction is made between the Northern and Southern Arabs. Whilst the people of Northern Arabia were mostly pastoral nomads, the people of Southern Arabia were sedentary agriculturists.

States emerged at the beginning of the third millennium B.C. in Mesopotamia, Egypt and later in Syria. But we have no concrete information about any state in Yemen in the third and the second millennium B.C., because written documents from this period are not available and little has been done in the area of archaeological research in this region. However, recent archaeological research in Arabia and particularly in Yemen has shown that this country had been settled from the Paleolithic through the Mesolithic and Neolithic to the Bronze age. It must be taken into account that Yemen is a part of the ancient Near East and was not isolated from the process of cultural evolution there. However, the development of civilization in the ancient Near East did not take place in all regions at the same

[1] This does not appear to be quite correct, as there are also mountains of considerable (2000–3000 m) hight in Yemen (note of the editors).

time and at the same rate.

The state emerged in Southern Arabia at the beginning of the first millennium B.C. The first state was Saba' and then later Ma'īn, Qatabān and Hadramawt.[1] There were also other small states, *e.g.* Awsān. At the beginning these states were vassals of Saba', yet by the middle of the first millennium B.C. Ma'īn, Qatabān and Hadramawt became independent.

Agriculture and trade formed the basic economy of the country, and irrigation systems were widely in use from around the beginning of the second millennium B.C. These factors contributed to a high level of material culture in ancient Yemen which continued for more than 1500 years until the appearance of Islam.

Our primary information about the culture of Ancient Yemen comes from thousands of South Arabian inscriptions which have been discovered in the country. They were written in a Semitic language in several dialects, namely Minaic, Hadramitic, Qatabanian and Sabaic.[2] The latter is the most evident and known dialect. Generally speaking, every state had its own dialect. The archaeological and anthropological data, as well as writings of Classical and Arabic authors also contribute to our knowledge of ancient Yemen.

Thus, the bearers of the South Arabian culture in the first millennium B.C. were Semitic peoples called Sabaeans, Minaeans, Qatabaneans, Hadrameans and other small groups. These people developed a distinct autochthonous literate culture that was nevertheless not isolated from the cultural process in the ancient Near East. These agricultural communities, which possibly moved from northeast[3] Arabia southwards, settled in the valleys stemming from the Yemen highlands and draining the desert called Sayhad (today Ramlat al-Sab'atayn), and in Wādī Hadramaut.

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[1] It seems necessary to take into consideration the fact that in the authentic South Arabian texts these names are used as denominations of certain socio-cultural groups (sha'bs), and never states (note of the editors).

[2] They are often considered to be separate (though closely related) languages – see e.g. L. Kogan & A. Korotayev. "Sayhadic Languages (Epegraphic South Arabian)", Robert Hetzron, ed. Semitic Languages. London: Routledge, 1997: 157–183 (note of the editors).

[3] Or rather northwest Arabia – see e.g. A. Korotayev. "The Earliest Sabaeans in the Jawf: A Reconsideration", Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy. 9 (1998): 118-124 (note of the editors).

Noteworthy are the recent archaeological investigations in Yemen which have furnished striking examples of the advanced culture of this country, such as huge temples, walled cities, irrigation works, sculptures in bronze and stone, and jewelry. In addition to these works, the literary element of this high culture is now known to be a fundamental characteristic (Grohmann 1963; Doe 1983; Daum 1987; Nebes 1994; EY). Of importance are the most recent investigations which, according to C 14, pinpoint the chronology of South Arabian inscriptions back to the tenth century B.C. (Kitchen 1994). They have confirmed what has already been mainly suggested by H. von Wissmann[1] in his several works, which have greatly contributed to the ancient history and geography of Yemen (*e.g.* von Wissmann 1982). It is difficult to establish a chronology for ancient Yemen like Mesopotamia or Egypt, a fact which has left the chronological system in this country to be based mostly on synchronisms with other systems in the ancient Near East. Nevertheless, an eponym system had been developed in the old Sabaean period and later an absolute dating system starting with the Himyarite era (*ca.* 115 or 110 B.C.) was also developed (Kitchen 1994: 120–138).

The study of the state formation has been a subject of research by sociologists, ethnologists, historians, ethno-archaeologists and other scholars for several decades. Yet only few specific studies on the origins and the formation of the state in Yemen have been conducted, a fact which makes the study of the state in this region a difficult task (Lundin 1967; Beeston 1972). However, pioneer works have been done on the social and economical history of South Arabia, and the study of the cultural history and the language of ancient Yemen has increased in the last three decades through the effort of several scholars, which helps us to understand more about the cultural history of this country than ever before.

The purpose of this paper is not to discuss the different and controversial theories of the state, nor to reconsider these theories (Wittfogel 1981; Eisenstadt *et al.* 1988; Kürsat-Ahlers 1994; Service 1975; Claessen & Skalnik 1981; Claessen & Skalnik 1978; Yoffee & Cowgill 1991). A re-

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[1] And Avraam Lundin – see e.g. A. G. Lundin. Gosudarstvo mukarribov Saba‘(sabeyskiy eponimat) [The State of Mukarribs of Saba‘]. Moscow: Nauka, 1971 (note of the editors).

consideration of the various theories concerning the study of the state has been done by several researchers, *e.g.* Eisenstadt (1988) and Sellnow (1988). These theories are usually divided into several categories: environmental circumscription, class conflict (Engels 1884; Diakonoff 1991; Herrmann 1988), managerial necessity (Stein & Rothman 1994) &c. They will be taken into account in dealing with the subject, but this paper will primarily be a mere outline of the state system in ancient Yemen according to the available sources. It will include a sketch of the formation of the state in ancient Yemen and will give a brief presentation of its origins, its development, social structure, internal structure, political organizations, power forms and related aspects. In this context, the "Introduction" (*al-Muqaddimah*) by the Arabic historian and sociologist Ibn Khaldūn (A.D. 1332–1406) has contributed a great deal to our understanding of the formation of the state.

In spite of the large number of definitions of the state, derived from the various theories, there are some common characteristics which are generally accepted. As regards the general definition of the state we may say that it is a dominant form of a society characterized by sovereign control of a territory and autonomous political institutions. Moreover, it is based on a centralized system of surplus appropriation and represents an authority of legitimate force.

Two centers in the ancient Near East are considered to be the core locations for the emergence of the state. These are Egypt (Endesfelder 1988: 372–377) and Mesopotamia (Diakonoff 1991; Maisels 1990; Breuer 1990: 172–194; Klengel 1988: 319–327). Other states appeared later in what may be called the first states' periphery – in Syria-Palestine (Buccelati 1967), Asia Minor and in Yemen. However, a core and a periphery can also be seen in the evolution of the state in ancient Yemen. Saba‘ was the core for the emergence of the state which influenced the appearance of other states in the country. The expansion of Saba‘ was also a major impetus for the emergence of secondary states in Ethiopia. The South Arabian culture penetrated into this country in the first half of the first millennium B.C. and influenced the appearance of the state of Aksum (Kaplan 1988; Kobishchanov 1978). The state of Kindah with its center in the caravan station Qaryat al-Faw (Al-Ansary 1982) in Wādī al-Dawāsir also emerged not far

from the Yemen border. Every state in ancient Yemen had its own central territory which was controlled by the political power of the state, and had its own political, legal and military institutions.

The history of ancient Yemen are usually divided into three main phases. The ancient Sabaic period has two subdivisions: the *mukarrib* period from the beginning of the first millennium until the middle of it, and then the time in which kings ruled until the first century B.C. The Middle Sabaic period extends from the beginning of the first century B.C. until the forth century A.D., whereas the Late Sabaic period covers the fifth and sixth centuries A.D. These phases correspond roughly to three stages in the formation and development of the state in this area.

I. Economic Foundations

The so-called Asiatic mode of production which has been the subject of debate by many scholars, especially from the Marxist tradition, for several decades, and other relevant theories on economical systems, will not be discussed here (Maisels 1990; about the economic structure in the ancient Near East see Silver 1985). This is just a brief presentation of the economic basis of the ancient Yemeni society.

Two economic factors played an important role in the formation of the state in ancient Yemen: agriculture and international trade. Agriculture was intensively practiced in Yemen at the beginning of the first millennium B.C. This was due to sufficient precipitation in some areas of Yemen and the development of new techniques to control flood waters in valleys through the erection of dams. Several kinds of cereals, fruits and vegetables were cultivated. The epigraphic materials inform us well about this cultivation. Dates seem to be one of the most widely cultivated fruits in ancient Yemen, and palm gardens in addition to vineyards are well attested in the inscriptions.

Cattle was an important basis of ancient Yemen agriculture. They were used as draft animals to pull ploughs and to produce milk, meat and hides. Goats and sheep were also raised for their meat, hide, milk and wool.

Agriculture was the fundamental economic base in the societies of the Southern Arabian states. The potential of the South Arabian agricultural societies required a high degree of social organization as does every agri-

cultural society. This was the first step in the development of a complexity which led to the formation of a state.

Most of the people of ancient South Arabia were free peasants who had their own land and lived in villages, particularly in the highlands of Yemen. It seems possible to say that agriculture in this country depended on peasants (Beeston 1986). Peasants are usually defined as agriculturists or rural peoples having connections to cities or to states and dependent on urban life. They are at any rate different from the tribal bedouin groups who practiced agriculture. The largest portion of the fertile and irrigated land was owned by the ruling aristocracy, noble families, clans, privileged sedentary communities (*sha'b*s) and the temple elite. These comprised the higher class which not only owned large estates but also had control over vassals, clients, serfs and tenant farmers who had a general designation as *'dm* (Preissler 1984). *Adīm* (*'dm*) seems to be a social group of "clients" like the *mawālī* of the Islamic period. Slaves made up only a small part of the society and had no rights or property. The lower class owned cultivated fields, but they were obliged to relinquish some of their crops and to pay taxes to their lords. Corvee-labor was practiced by the kings of Yemen for reconstructing official buildings such as temples, palaces and the installation of dams. The work was done by the lower class and slaves (Grohmann 1963: 124–126; Rhodokanakis 1927).

Irrigated land was the most important foundation for agriculture in ancient Yemen, and irrigated cultivation was widely developed in most parts of Yemen and especially in the valleys stemming from the highlands of Yemen and draining desert like Wādī al-Jawf, Wādī Adhanah and Wādī Bayhān (Hehmeyer 1991). Wādī Hadramawt, which drains into the Indian Ocean, was also a place where irrigation was widely practiced. Important for the appearance of the state in ancient Yemen was the fact that these four Wādīs were the centers of four South Arabian states: Ma'īn and its capital Qarnaw in Wādī al-Jawf, Saba' and its capital Mārib in Wādī Adhana, Qatabān and its capital Timna' in Wādī Bayhan, and Hadramawt with its capital Shabwah in Wādī Hadramawt.[1] The capitals of these states and other cities were located not only in these Wādīs but at the same time on

[1] It seems necessary, of course, to add to this list Awsān in Wādī Markhah (note of the editors).

the incense trade route. In any case the people of ancient Yemen learned to keep the seasonal rain floods with dams and then organize irrigation through canals. Arabic sources mention more than a hundred of these dams (EY II: 513–517). The most famous installation of irrigation works in Yemen is the great dam of Mārib, in Wādī Adhanah (Schmidt 1982). The history of the dam goes back to at least the beginning of the second millennium B.C. and continued through the ages until the seventh century A.D. when the dam was finally destroyed. One of the most important tasks of the Sabaean ruler was to take care of the Mārib's dam and to repair damages which occurred several times in history. Sabaic records inform us about damages which happened to the dam and efforts of the kings to reconstruct it. However, the last breaking of the dam at the beginning of the seventh century A.D. is described in the Arabic Classical sources as a catastrophe and is mentioned in al-Qur'ān as the end of the kingdom of Saba'. Arabic sources maintain that many tribes left Yemen after the breaking of the dam and that this event led to the end of the South Arabian culture. It can be assumed that part of the society did in fact lose its economic base after the dam broke.

Already in the second half of the second millennium B.C. the South Arabian society had reached the level of a complex urban society. One of the most important features of this culture was the appearance of different professions. Craft specialization and economic innovations were required through the development of the agricultural society of ancient Yemen. It must be taken into account that the different sectors of the state economy, such as the planting of incense and trade, were influenced and dependent upon each other. Meanwhile, an advanced stage of surplus food production stimulated the appearance of professional craftsmen such as artists, metal smiths, potters, architects, masons, carpenters, scribes, leather workers, goldsmiths, jewelers, etc. This is testified by the fact that the manufactured wool textiles of Yemen were famous in pre-Islamic Arabia as well as skillful, monumental architecture and other art works found in this region.

Trade was the second most important foundation of ancient Yemen society. The people of ancient Yemen controlled the sea routes to Africa and India by using the monsoon winds. They carried the exquisite products of these countries to the Mediterranean countries. Above all, the excellent

location of Yemen helped its people to become go-betweens in the trade of goods between India, Africa and the Mediterranean countries (Groom 1981; Crone 1987; Simon 1989). In all cases they controlled not only the sea routes but also the axis of land trade routes. For its richness this land was known as Arabia Felix in the Classical world.

All South Arabian states were involved in the trade of frankincense, myrrh and other aromata, and monopolized trade routes to Egypt, Syria-Palestine and Mesopotamia from the beginning of the first millennium B.C. (Müller 1978). The kingdom of Maʻīn was established and flourished in Wādī al-Jawf. It was famous for its cities such as Qarnaw (modern Maʻīn) and Yathill (modern Barāqish). The Minaeans were mostly traders and no real military activities relating to them have been discovered according to the available sources. They were not like the Sabaean who are described as a warlike people. The economic base of the Minaean society was primarily trade, and it may be assumed that the Minaean kingdom was a type of merchants' corporation.

International trade of frankincense and myrrh only became possible after the domestication of the camel in the middle of the second millennium B.C., which may have taken place in North West Arabia (Zarins 1992). It seems that South Arabian merchants already used the camel in the second half of the second millennium B.C. Sabaean caravans can be traced back to the tenth century. The visit of the legendary Queen of Sheba (Sabaʻ), which is recorded in the Old Testament, to King Solomon is an indication of this (Groom 1981). We also have some information about Sabaean caravans (Liverani 1992) from the cuneiform sources from the eighth century B.C., and Sabaʻ is the only South Arabian state which is mentioned in these sources (Ephʻal 1982: 87–89).

South Arabian merchants, especially Minaeans, set up trading colonies in North Arabia such as al-ʻUlá (Dedan), and merchant communities were planted in Greece and Egypt to organize the trade. These communities had the function of securing the dynamic and continuity of trade throughout the whole year. It seems that the trade was mostly governed by the king and the ruling class. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that there were merchants in South Arabia working on the basis of their own capital and acting as free agents concerned only with their own profits. They had, of course, close

relationships with the ruling class. A good example of these types of traders is the Minaean merchant clan, the Gebbanite (*’hl gb’n*, Doe 1983: 99).

When exactly trade relations between ancient Yemen and Egypt started is difficult to pinpoint. It appears to have occurred in the second millennium B.C. The Egyptian sources mention a land called Punt to be a land of incense, and Queen Hatshepsut from the Eighteenth Dynasty launched a sea expedition to Punt. The land of Punt, which is said to be located on the lower part of the Red Sea, is most likely to have included both sides of Bāb al-Mandab, the Somaliland and South Arabia (Müller 1978: 739–741). Meanwhile, the frankincense and myrrh of South Arabia were enormously valued by Egyptians not only for perfume, ointment and incense, but also for mummification. These products of ancient Yemen were brought to Egypt either by caravans using the incense trade route through Palestine to Egypt or by ship across the maritime road of the Red Sea (Groom 1981). The *Periplus Maris Erythraei*, a book whose author is unknown from the first century A.D. (Casson 1989) and which served sailors as a guide for the Red Sea, gives us information not only about South Arabian trade but also about Yemeni harbors like Qāni’ on the Indian Ocean.

There is no doubt that a type of market economy existed in ancient Yemen. We have some information about it from epigraphic materials such as market codes (Müller 1983; Grohmann 1963: 135–40; Simon 1989: 78–91). Craftsmen worked not only for the temple and the royal household, but also for marketing and export. In association with the market economy was the development of the South Arabian coinage system beginning at least in the third century B.C. In addition to this, incense trade and market economy transformed the economic structure of ancient Yemen from a household to a state economy.

The land was property of the "national" god. The rulers and priests who were representatives of the national god on earth administrated this property (Ryckmans 1971; 1983; Grohmann 1963: 121–122). Temples in ancient Yemen were not only holy places but also marketplaces. According to the sources, frankincense was brought from Dhofar by sea to the Hadramitic harbor Qāni’ and then transported on camels to Shabwa, the capital of Hadramawt. After they had brought it to the temple of Siyan (*s^1yn*), the national god of Hadramawt, and before being marketed, it was measured

and the tithe was taken by the temple (Müller 1978; Groom 1981; Ryckmans 1983). It is remarkable that temples in ancient Yemen owned substantial holdings. How large the property of the temples was is difficult to estimate. A kind of temple-feudalism has been suggested to have existed here (Grohmann 1963; Rhodokanakis 1927). It must have been, however, substantial in the ancient Sabaic period and continued to be considerable later. The tithe was the most important tax which was gathered for the temple in all periods of the ancient history of the country. Besides this, a state taxation system was developed. This can be seen according to different terms denoting several kinds of taxes (Grohmann 1963, 125–26; Korotayev 1995).

North Arabian bedouin tribes (sg. *qabīlah*) began to penetrate into South Arabia from the beginning of the first centuries A.D. The basis of the bedouin economy in South Arabia was cattle and camel-herding (Dostal 1985). It is well known that this kind of economy is not stable and represents a source of conflict which could and often did threaten the security of the society of the cultural area. A good example for these tribes is the tribe Amir (*'mr^{m}*). The people of this tribe were pastoralists (Höfner 1959). They herded camels and were simultaneously involved in trade and lived around the incense route.

The development of irrigation systems and international trade were the most important factors for the comprehensive transformation of the South Arabian society and the emergence of the state.

II. Social Structure

Little is known about the society of ancient Yemen before the first millennium B.C. This makes it difficult to describe the socio-economical development accurately. Nevertheless, a general presentation may be given according to the archaeological data and the general development of the cultural history of the ancient Near East.

For many thousands of years, life of mankind in Yemen was based on the hunting of wild animals and the gathering of wild plants as in other parts of the ancient world. The society of food collectors and hunters lived and moved in small bands (Maisels 1990). Several archaeological sites and rock drawings of these people have been discovered in Yemen. The Neo-

lithic age (*ca.* 8000–4500 B.C.), which is described as the Neolithic revolution, was an important step in the development of the civilization of human beings. This is the period of agricultural evolution and domestication of plants and animals in the Ancient Near East. Mankind began to produce his own food and gradually settled down permanently in villages (Maisels 1990). Several sites representing the prehistoric period have been discovered in Yemen. Some of these villages later developed into cities in the Bronze age (de Maigret 1987).

Big settlements appeared in the second millennium B.C. indicating a move towards complexity. It appears that Mārib did exist as a large city in the second millennium B.C. Geological studies in the oasis of Mārib have proved, according to the sediments of irrigation, that the dam of Mārib was used at that time (Brunner 1983). One of the most important aspects of the urban life in Yemen in this period was the development of food production techniques through the use of metal tools as in other parts of the ancient Near East. An increased demand for specialization in several sectors of social and economic life took place through the production of surplus agricultural products. Specialization was essential for the development of several institutions in the society and was the first step toward the establishment of cities and the development of a stratified or class society.

There are many terms in South Arabian records which give us information about the social life in ancient Yemen. South Arabic has special terms to denote not only the sedentary tribes (*sha'b*s) but also their various subdivisions as well as other social groups, tribal units and political structure (Ryckmans 1951; Sab. Dic.; Beeston 1979; Korotayev 1995; 1996). From the available data it is possible to study the structure of ancient Yemen society, yet there are still several social terms whose meaning we do not know exactly. Thus, the question of the character of socio-economic relations in ancient Yemen is extremely complex and cannot be regarded as resolved.

The city was the core from which states developed. A city had, in general, experience in administration and political organization. Several cities have been discovered through archaeological excavations and epigraphic research. Usually a city is designated by the South Arabic word *hagar* (*hgr*). But it is still difficult to know exactly the function of *hagar*

and whether all cities were precisely designated as *hagar* or not. Beeston suggests that *hagar* was the center of a *sha'b* which seems to be plausible (Beeston 1972). It could also probably have been a center of the state administration. Cities of Yemen in the first millennium were walled cities (Doe 1983).

The emergence of the state in Yemen at the beginning of the first millennium B.C. was propounded by social and economic development in the second half of the second millennium B.C. This was also associated with the appearance of class stratification in the society. It can be assumed that stratification started in the second millennium B.C., but there is no solid data about this. However, stratification brought with it the unification and integration of diverse *sha'b*s, clans and villages into one single society, and led to the establishment of the state.

The South Arabian society can be divided into the following classes: nobles, clients, commoners and slaves. We do not have solid information about slaves in the ancient society of Yemen; for example whether they were recognized as an institution or not, and therefore it is difficult to characterize ancient Yemen society as a slave-owning society. We may say, however, that slavery in the ancient Near East did not reach the form of Greek and Roman slavery and was in any case different (Dandamayev 1992). Commoners were obliged to provide agricultural and military services to the elite.

The people of ancient Yemen had common Semitic agricultural terms, which indicate that they practiced cultivation before they settled in Yemen and may have been half-nomads. The South Arabian society was definitely agricultural and not bedouin. South Arabian inscriptions inform us well about bedouins in this area. They are designated as "Arabs" (*'rb* pl.''*rb*). From the second century A.D. onwards, the "Arabs" constituted a recognizable characteristic of the South Arabian society (Höfner 1959). They worked in trade and herded animals (especially camels) and they served as soldiers in the army (Beeston 1976). Apparently good relationships were established between the inhabitants of cities and the nomadic groups. It is a general phenomenon in the ancient Near East that bedouins comprised part of the society (Klengel 1971) and this has continued up to

the present times. Tribes in Yemen are still an important factor in the society (Dostal 1985; Dresch 1989).

In the three main stages of the development of the state in ancient Yemen there are specific terms describing the variability of the socio-political organizations for each stage. However, the state in Yemen was not an event but a process. Its system had a number of original features which were due to peculiarities in its socio-economic and political development. Written sources from Yemen, including the so-called "federation formula" (Höfner 1957; von Wissman 1982: 52–56), record political activities by the *mukarrib*s which give indications about the formation of the state. These inscriptions inform us about the unification and integration of social groups and communities together into a kind of "federation" in association with the cult of the "federal" deity.

III. Kingship and Political Structure

The influence that the social structure in South Arabia had on the political structure is of major importance, not only in the initial stages of cultural formation but also for the formation of the state. It has been stressed by several scholars that agricultural societies have in general a high degree of organization (Service 1975; Mann 1986). The specific political system which developed here does have some parallels with other parts of the political systems of the ancient Near East.

An irrigation network requires a kind of centralized supervision in order to become established (Wittfogel 1981), which is at least one reason for the development of political organization. In this case the emergence of such a political organization in ancient Yemen can be compared with the political development in Egypt and the Sumerian city-states. Another indication of the appearance of political power in ancient Yemen is the construction of monumental buildings such as temples. Their construction needs the organization of mass labor, which requires centralized power with the ability to organize large numbers of people to do such work. The huge temples of the main Sabaean deity Almaqah near Mārib such as Mahram Bilqīs (Doe 1983; Jamme 1962), al-Masājid and Bar ān, as well as his temple in Sirwāh surely needed a central power which in this case was organized by the Sabaean rulers. These monumental constructions can be

compared with monuments in other parts of the ancient Near East such as the *ziggurrats* in Mesopotamia and the pyramids in Egypt, which are used by scholars to characterize the early stage of the state in these countries.

The *sha'b* was at any rate not only a socio-economic unit but also a political organization which preserved not only the internal order but also dealt with external affairs. Some *sha'b*s could also be described as ethnic groups (for the definition of an ethnic group see Smith 1988: 21–68). The *sha'b,* which obviously had no kinship basis was formed as a community already in the pre-state period, and these communities (*sha'b*s) as political units formed the state together. The most important factor for the formation of this political organization, *i.e.* the state, was the military power. On the other hand, a peaceful federation or a league as a core for state formation is also recorded, not only for Saba' but also for other states such as Qatabān. A federation between several tribes called "children of 'Amm" (*wld 'm*) made up the political structure of Qatabān (Ryckmans 1951). Most scholars of ancient Yemen accept that the state in this country was a type of federation. Beeston described the Sabaean state as a "commonwealth" (Beeston 1972). It seems that the *sha'bs* continued to exercise important functions even after the establishment of the state. But the state was often able to integrate the *sha'b*s through its central power, and this was only possible when the state was strong and able to control all the different kinds of social groups, casts and classes of the society and subject them to its central authority. In the earliest period the chief of a *sha'b* was usually called *kabīr* "big man, chief". Some *kabīr*s were later integrated into the state system and became royal administrators. From the first centuries A.D. until the decline of the pre-Islamic South Arabian civilization, the term *qayl* (*qyl, qwl*) "chief, spokesman" was used to denote the ruler of the *sha'b,* and Arabic sources maintain that they were kings of Yemen (Beeston 1979; Robin 1981). However, the *sha'b* as a political unit may be also compared with the community of the city-states of Syria-Palestine (Buccellati 1967; Thiel 1980; Malamat 1992; Ryckmans 1983).

1. The Mukarrib and the King

In the first stage of the state in ancient Yemen the ruler was called *mukarrib* (*mkrb*). Most scholars of South Arabian studies accept that the

mukarrib was a kind of "priest-ruler" and this early stage in the life of the state in South Arabia is called the *mukarrib* period. However, this form of government has been compared with Sumerian city-states, whereas *mukarrib* is compared with *ENSI* (Diakonoff 1991a), the ruler of these city-states (Höfner 1957). Meanwhile, the *mukarrib* as a ruler is attested in most states, *i.e.* Saba', Hadramawt, Qatabān, but not in Ma'in which had from the beginning a ruler called a king (*mlk*), a fact indicating that another type of political development had taken place in Ma'in. The *mukarrib* period is designated by a theocratic form of government. The *mukarrib* was responsible for governing political, economic and religious affairs and formed the military leaders of the state. In ancient Yemen the political elite was drawn from aristocratic clans. Islamic Yemenite historians maintain that eight noble clans (*al-mathāminah*) had the political power in their hands in pre-Islamic Yemen (Robin 1991).

We have evidence of a specific process of development of political power and government in ancient Yemen. The *mukarrib* (*mkrb*) was followed by a king (*malik*, *mlk*), and this started in Saba' through the Kariba'il Watar (RES 3945) in the beginning of the seventh century B. C. He was the first *mukarrib* who used the king's title (*malik*). Thus he was the first king in South Arabia. In a long inscription he describes his expansion in the region and claims his control over most of it. The rule of Kariba'il Watar is to be described as the development of political power and as a transition from the *mukarrib* to the royal period.[1] It is a clear sign of the institutionalization of central leadership and it was the largest step toward the establishment of the state and kingship in ancient Yemen, the development of the royal administration, hereditary aristocracy and the secularity of state institutions.

A very important feature for the emergence of the state in Yemen was the presence of "national" gods. Every state had its "national" god:

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[1] For a more convincing treatment of this problem see Beeston 1972: the title mukarrib co-existed with the title malik (king) throughout the 1st millennium B.C. The kings were at the very beginning political leaders of sha'bs, whereas the title mukarrib belonged only to the kings which exercised a sort of hegemony in the South Arabian world. Thus, in the 1st millinnium B.C. there would be normally a few kings in South Arabia, but only one mukarrib (though, of course, we would attest two mukarribs si-

Almaqah in Saba’, Wadd in Ma‘īn, Siyān in Hadramawt and ‘Amm in Qatabān.

According to the epigraphic materials, the ideology of the state was as follows: "national god, sovereign, nation" (Grohmann 1963: 121–22; Ryckmans 1951; 1983). The legitimization of the royal power in ancient Yemen through the religious ideology was important. The ruler here is described to be the "first born" of the national deity. The people called themselves "children of that deity" or they are designated as the "community" of that deity. It is said, for example, that the *mukarrib* or the king of Saba’ is the first born of their main god Almaqah (*bkr ’lmqh*), and that the Sabaeans are "children of Almaqah" (*wld ’lmqh*). The same can be said for the other states.

The study of royal titles is very important in understanding the development of political power in ancient Yemen. In the ancient Sabaic period in Saba’ the rulers had the title "*mukarrib* of Saba’" and later "king of Saba’".[1] In the first century onwards they had long royal titles indicating federation and unification (Bāfaqīh 1990; Kitchen 1994). After the unification of Saba’ and Himyar in one state the ruler had the title "the king of Saba’ and dhū-Raydān". Dhū-Raydān is a designation for Himyar, a tribe which appeared in the second century B.C. northeast of Aden, and acquired later a considerable power and established the Sabaean-Himyarite empire around the third century A.D. About A.D. 295 the king Shammar Yahar‘ish took the royal title "king of Saba’, dhū-Raydān, Hadramawt and Yamnat". In the first third of the fifth century A.D. the king Abūkarib As‘ad had the title "king of Saba’, dhū-Raydān, Hadramawt, Yamnat and their Bedouins in Tawdum[2] and Tihāmah[1]".

One of the most important features of the kingdom was the role of the royal palaces established especially in the capitals and centers of the South Arabian states. Good examples for these are: the royal palace Salhīn in Mārib, the capital of Saba’ and the royal palace Raydān in Zafār, the capital of the Himyarite kings of Saba’ and dhū-Raydān, who under their

multaneously when two kings contested the hegemony in South Arabia, though such cases are very rare) (note of the editors).

1 See our previous note (note of the editors).

2 The Plateau (note of the editors).

rule brought the Kingdom of Saba' and dhū-Raydān to a peak. Moreover, the palace Ghumdān in San'ā' and the Hadramitic royal palace Shaqir in Shabwah were also of importance. We have information about these palaces from the Classical Arabic sources and South Arabian inscriptions (Müller 1986).

The Sabaean king stood at the head of the state. But royal power was regarded as the collective power of the tribe Saba' and a few other noble tribes stood with Saba' in alliance. The ruler in ancient Yemen was not a god but a divinely selected agent; he was the priest, the channel between heaven and earth. He is destined by the divine to bring justice and righteous order to his people. The king had his background as *primus inter paris* as did other kings in the ancient Near East, but in Yemen it is most likely that his power did not develop into absolute power as is described in Mesopotamia (Diakonoff 1991b). This was not possible due to the fragmentation of the society. The king had the function of organizing the relations between the tribes (*sha'b*s), which continued to constitute stable socio-political units. He was the head of a confederation and not a completely integrated state.

2. Organs of the state

The emergence of the state in ancient Yemen is characterized by the development of several institutions which formed and built the organization of the state. There is no concrete information about the internal relations between these institutions (Ryckmans 1951; Grohmann 1963: 130–131; Lundin 1967).

The council

The state council (*miswad*) seems to have consisted of landowners or chiefs (*sayyid*, chief) of the *sha'b*s. Apparently, the council was a general assembly of landlords. The kings of Ma'īn, for example, ruled together with *miswad* (Grohmann 1963: 128–131). *Miswad* seems to have been one of the most early institutions of the state and continued to function in the Ancient and Middle Sabaean periods. In addition to the state council there

[1] The Coastal Plain (note of the editors).

were also councils in the cities in which all noble clans and *sha'b*s were represented.

Priesthood

Religious institutions were one the most important organs of the state. The inscriptions give us information about the hierarchy of the temple service. In spite of difficulties in understanding these different terms, the function of different kinds of priests (*rs²w*, *s²w'*) can be reconstructed, and it may be said that there were various classifications of priests who worked in the temple service, *e.g.* the temple administrator (*qyn, 'fkl*). We are not informed well about the specialized personnel acting in conjunction with the priests such as singers, astrologers and interpreters of dreams. At the same time, huge temple complexes like Mahram Bilqīs, the temple of the Sabaean deity Almaqah, surely required a well-developed priesthood. This institution appeared in the *mukarrib* period and seems to be the most important organ of the state at this time. Noble clans, *e.g.* dhū-Khalīl, controlled this institution (Ryckmans 1951; 1971; 1983). When the kingship was established, the power of the temple under the king was reduced and priests lost their judicial and political authority. Their function was relegated simply to one of the institutions of the kingdom.[1]

There is also one other important aspect of the emergence of the state which can be seen in association with priesthood. This is the development of the South Arabian script. It is accepted among scholars that this script was borrowed from the Canaanites sometime in the second half of the second millennium B.C. (Knauf 1989). However, the origin and development of scripts in the ancient Near East may also be seen in association with institutions such as temples and states. From the beginning the South Arabian script was closely related to the appearance and decline of the state in ancient Yemen.

[1] In the Sabaean Kingdom, however, the temples appear to have recovered their authority completely in the Middle Period (especially in the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D.) becoming in many respects more important politically than the royal power. For example, for this period we have practically no data at all confirming the existence of the royal taxation, and lots of data on the temple tithe (which in no way was controlled by the kings) – see e.g. Korotayev 1996 (note of the editors).

Legal System

Intricate court systems appeared in advanced urban society in the ancient Near East, and a legal system was important for the internal structure of the state (Herzog 1988). Unfortunately, no codex like that of Hammurabi of Babylon has survived in Southern Arabia, but we are informed from the inscriptions about the legal system in the states there. Written laws and edicts were discovered in Yemen such as the Qatabanean market code (Müller 1983; Rhodokanakis 1927; Grohmann 1963, 132–140). There are well-preserved juridical epigraphic documents about different sectors of life and society. According to these documents it may be assumed that these laws organized and regulated the legal foundations of the society, such as economic exchange, market codes, taxations, marriages, religious rituals, penal codes, etc. Moreover, many juridical terms are attested in the inscriptions (Sab. Dic). No information is available as to whether courts may have been established in different cities or not. However, it may be assumed that courts were associated with the rulers' palaces, which not only functioned as courts of appeals but were also open for the commoners to present their problems. It is well known that laws must somehow be enforced by a political authority within the society and that they must be abided by the people. No solid information about the practicing of laws and customs in ancient South Arabia is available. However, the special significance of the juridical documents is that they reveal a long constitutional development.

Warfare and the South Arabian Army

One of the fundaments for the development of civilization is an increase in the scale of warfare. Scholars who study the origins of states insist that the army is an important feature of a state (Mann 1986). However, armies are suggested to mark the rise and fall of empires in the ancient Near East such as Egypt, Assyria, Persia, &c., and this can also be seen in the case of ancient Yemen. Information is available about the South Arabian army and its hierarchical structure from inscriptions (Beeston 1976). This army seems to be the most important organ in the state. With the power of this army Kariba‘il Watar (the first third of the seventh century

B.C.) was able to capture most of Yemen. The South Arabian army was organized into different types of soldiers, infantry, spearmen, horsemen, and camel-riders. The most important weapons used were spears and swords. We do not have information about the use of chariots in ancient Yemen as was the case in Mesopotamia or Egypt. Nomadic warriors and brigades, in particular camel-riders and horsemen, served in the army. Drilled armies of increasing size were first developed under Kariba‘il Watar, and the strongest South Arabian army may be dated to the time of the Himyarite kings of Saba‘ and dhū-Raydān during the first centuries of our era. It was possible through the mechanisms of this standing army to control not only Yemen but also to geographically expand through raids into Central Arabia. There is no real concrete evidence as to what is called "military democracy" in Yemen.

South Arabian inscriptions provide information on war and fighting between the rival South Arabian kingdoms. These wars seem to have been over possession of land resources, water and control of the trade routes. The inscriptions also give information about the fighting against the Abyssinians who eventually captured the country after several military attacks in A.D. 525. This marked the end of the sovereignty of the state and culture in Yemen which had lasted for about 1500 years.

Conclusion

The state appeared in ancient Yemen at the beginning of the first millennium B.C. and continued until the eve of Islam. Evidence gained from the epigraphic materials, Arabic and Classical sources points to a well-organized economy based on agriculture, especially irrigated land, trade and handicraft, to an established centralized leadership headed in the archaic period by a theocratic ruler called *mukarrib* and then by a king.[1] The state was substantiated by an intricate system of authority based on religious ideology, laws and military power. The state was formed by sedentary communities joined together by the means of a type of federation.

[1] See note 7 above (note of the editors).

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